

*WORK SESSION OF THE GREENBELT CITY COUNCIL held Wednesday, July 5, 2017, to discuss election issues.*

*Mayor Jordan started the meeting at 8:04 p.m. The meeting was held in the multi-purpose room of the Greenbelt Community Center.*

*PRESENT WERE: Councilmembers Judith F. Davis, Leta Mach, Konrad Herling, Silke Pope, Edward V. J. Putens, Rodney Roberts and Mayor Emmett V. Jordan.*

*STAFF PRESENT WERE: Nicole Ard, City Manager; David Moran, Assistant City Manager; and Shaniya Lashley-Mullen, Administrative Assistant.*

*ALSO PRESENT WERE: Ema Smith, Julie Sharapi and Findley Holland, Youth Advisory Committee; Rev. Ray Raysor, Community Relations Advisory Board; Rick Gordon, Park and Recreation Advisory Board; Laura Kressler, Public Safety Advisory Committee; Pamela Gregory, Patricia Evans and Steven Gilbert, Board of Elections; Jeff Harris, Bill Orleans, Colin Byrd, Cynthia Newcomer, Bob Rudd and others.*

*Mayor Jordan advised this work session is a result of petitions Council has received over the year. Mayor Jordan stated that it's four months until the Greenbelt Election and they are held every two years.*

#### *Voting Age*

*Mayor Jordan stated this topic has been a discussion at a couple of work sessions, a public hearing and was on the May 22 Regular Meeting agenda. The Board of Elections (BOE) didn't take a stand on the topic but it has the support of the Advisory Committee on Education (ACE.)*

*Ms. Davis asked were there only three municipalities in the state of Maryland that allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote in city elections. Mr. Moran stated he only checked Maryland. Takoma Park, Hyattsville and Glenarden are the only three municipalities that allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote.*

*Ms. Davis stated that Hyattsville and Takoma Park allow U.S. non-citizens to vote in their elections as well. She advised they did it by a charter change, not by referendum.*

*Mayor Jordan stated he has spoken with Council Member Solomon, City of Hyattsville, and he stated there were only an additional 50 people who voted in the last election. Mayor Jordan also spoke with the Mayor of Takoma Park and she stated there wasn't that much of a difference in their election results as well.*

*Ms. Pope and Ms. Mach advised they heard the same at the Large City Forum at the Maryland Municipal League (MML). Mr. Herling questioned how many 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote and how many did vote. Mr. Moran answered he didn't have that information. Mayor Jordan wanted to know if the percentage would change if we allow the 16 and 17 year olds to vote.*

*There was discussion on what the latest date an amendment to the charter could be made. Mr. Moran stated that early voting starts on October 21 and if Council chooses to suspend the rules,*

*it wouldn't be too late to add it to the August agenda.*

*Mr. Putens stated the charter has been around for eighty years and this is a significant change. The citizens of Greenbelt need to vote on this change.*

*Ms. Mach advised it was a two part question. The first part would be to change the charter to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote. The second part would be to allow them to serve on boards or run for City Council. It's a legal issue having 16 and 17 year olds sign documents.*

*There was discussion on the process of placing this item on referendum. The citizens of Greenbelt had 50 days to petition to get it changed. They only need 20% of the registered voters of Greenbelt to petition Council.*

*Mr. Roberts and Mr. Putens stated that it should be up to the citizens to make this decision; Council shouldn't amend the charter.*

*Ms. Davis stated that she is in favor of amending the charter. Putting it back on the ballot will get the same results. She thinks the citizens will say no.*

*Mr. Herling stated he is in support of amending the charter to allow 16 and 17 year olds to vote.*

*Ms. Pope stated she supports the idea of putting it on a referendum so the whole community can vote on it.*

*Ms. Julie Sharapi stated the referendum is not the right way to go because of the low turnout at the last election. If Council amends the charter, the citizens of Greenbelt still have a voice to petition the change.*

*Ms. Findley Holland stated there wasn't a large turnout in other municipalities, but the small turnout of the 16 and 17 year olds voices were heard.*

*Mr. Orleans stated that Council should make the decision.*

*Mr. Rick Gordon stated it's about the future of Greenbelt. The 16 and 17 year olds should have a right to vote.*

*Mr. Rudd stated he supports the idea of placing it on a referendum. He would support whatever the outcome of the referendum.*

*Ms. Newcomer stated she supports the amendment to the charter.*

*Rev. Raysor stated he supports the amendment to the charter.*

*Mr. Byrd stated that all work sessions should be recorded and there should have been more advance notice for this work session. Mayor Jordan stated that he pushed for all work sessions to be recorded, but responses to the RFP for construction of recording equipment and space modification were too expensive.*

*Ms. Raysor stated that 18 year olds at one point couldn't vote but could serve in the military.*

*Mr. Gordon stated that 16 and 17 year old voices can be used to push forward; they are already part of the change. He asked why Greenbelt can't lead.*

*Ms. Sharapi stated she doesn't see the direct connection for 16 and 17 years to serve in the military or drive all night long. She advised they have more risk; the right to vote is the 16 and 17 year olds civic duty.*

*Mr. Rudd stated the citizens of Greenbelt should decide if 16 and 17 year olds can serve on advisory boards and Council.*

*Ms. Ard advised at the August regular meeting, staff will prepare a draft charter change with the exact language that lists 16 and 17 year olds as qualified voters.*

#### *Resident vs. Citizen Voting*

*Mayor Jordan stated that any resident of Greenbelt who can prove they live within the City of Greenbelt limits should be allowed to vote in the City election.*

*Ms. Davis stated that the proposal it needed to go to an advisory board.*

*Mayor Jordan stated there are many non-citizens who have live and participated in Greenbelt but don't have the right to vote. There are many reasons why some individuals do not pursue citizenship*

*Mr. Moran advised that the municipalities that do allow non-citizens to vote in their elections maintain an additional registration list that was written in their charter or code.*

*Ms. Mach said anyone who wants to vote, needs to be a U.S. citizen or help them to become citizens.*

*Ms. Pope stated that she had to become a citizen. She stated she helped many people to guide them in the direction of becoming a citizen.*

*Mr. Putens stated that citizenship means a lot, and it should be done the right way. He asked if they are keeping separate books for noncitizens.*

*Ms. Pamela Gregory, Board of Elections, asked how municipalities register the people on a state roll. Mr. Moran answered stating they keep the books separate. Ms. Gregory also stated in order for the citizens to vote, they need a municipality voter registration card. Mr. Moran stated the voter registration card is done through Prince George's County. The charter could be amended to include additional items that are needed for non-citizens to vote and to keep a separate list.*

*Ms. Gregory stated the Board of Elections needed to do more research.*

#### *Selection of Mayor*

*Mr. Putens stated that there was one time that he knew of where the top vote getter didn't become mayor because that person turned down the position due to work schedule. Ms. Mach stated she did an interview back in 1987 and a man named Mr. East was elected to Council. He*

*was the highest vote getter, but he was the youngest on Council, so they made him Mayor Pro Tem.*

*Mayor Jordan advised this tradition has been in practice for some time.*

*Mr. Byrd stated that he understood tradition, and in the 2000 and 2016 election where the popular candidate didn't become president. Something was flawed; we shouldn't leave the will of the people to chance.*

*Mr. Moran advised that some jurisdictions have separate elections for mayors.*

*Ms. Davis advised that a community survey question was done in 2013, if there should be a separate election for mayor and 60% said no. Council would have to have a real good reason why the top voter didn't become mayor.*

*Mr. Roberts stated that a strong mayor causes division. They think they run the city and have special privileges. The way it is now, everyone is equal. Mr. Roberts suggested a floating chair. Every six months someone new becomes mayor.*

*Mr. Herling advised that in the early days in Greenbelt, they had more people running, far less now. Mayor Jordan stated it's different when 800 people vote for 12 vs. 24,000 voting for 7.*

*Ms. Mach agreed with Mr. Roberts, except for the floating chair idea.*

*A citizen advised he supports Mr. Byrd's petition. It's a big deal for the citizen and he can't imagine Council picking someone other than the top vote getter as mayor.*

*Mr. Orleans advised that he supports Mr. Byrd's petition. It should be written in the charter at this time. The top vote getter should become mayor and it's up to him or her to decline.*

*Mr. Byrd said that the current system is problematic. The current system causes division. It is a big deal that the top vote getter becomes mayor. After the election, the people have to wait a week to find out who becomes the mayor through the Greenbelt News Review. He also stated that because of the importance of the election issues being discussed, this work session should have been broadcast.*

*Ms. Davis stated that an 80 year tradition that works should be kept.*

#### Election Wards

*Ms. Mach advised that the City is divided by roads already; we don't need districts.*

*Ms. Pope advised that running for Council shouldn't be separated. It's one Greenbelt and when you run, you run for all of Greenbelt.*

*Mr. Gordon stated that some of the citizens feel that they don't have a representative on Council since they live in a certain area.*

*Mr. Herling advised running for office should mean doing well for the community. Having*

*districts is a step in the wrong direction.*

*Mr. Roberts asked do you want seven people to represent you or just one person. You can't get elected from one section of town where you live. You have to campaign in all parts of the City. You need to spark something to get out and vote and move on to positive issues.*

*Ms. Davis advised that there are Councilmembers from Greenbelt East and Historic Greenbelt. If Greenbelt gets to 30,000 or 35,000 citizens, we may need wards, but not right now. We need to make sure citizens join committees.*

*Mayor Jordan advised that this is a small city and you can walk from Greenbelt East to Franklin Park. There was only a 19% turn out for voting in the last election. You cannot get elected if you only focus on one area.*

*Mr. Rudd supports Mr. Gordon's petition for election districts; get more people to run and get more new ideas.*

*Mr. Orleans supports election districts.*

*Ms. Davis suggested adding election district to the community survey instead of a charter amendment or a referendum.*

*Mr. Byrd asked why does a speaker have to state their address when addressing Council.*

*Mr. Rudd said just bleep out the address.*

#### *Other Issues*

*Mayor Jordan asked the Board of Elections if a citizen goes to the wrong polling place, can he or she still cast his or her vote. Ms. Gregory answered yes, the election judge would inform the correct polling location, and if he or she informs the election judges, they can provide transportation to the correct location as well.*

*Council discussed the 2013 community survey results for term limits, recall process and Council elections every four years. It was decided to put the questions back on the community survey.*

*Mr. Orleans stated that the City should hold annual elections.*

*Information Items – Several informational items were discussed.*

*The meeting ended at 11:30 p.m.*

*Respectfully submitted,*

*Shaniya Lashley-Mullen  
Administrative Assistant*